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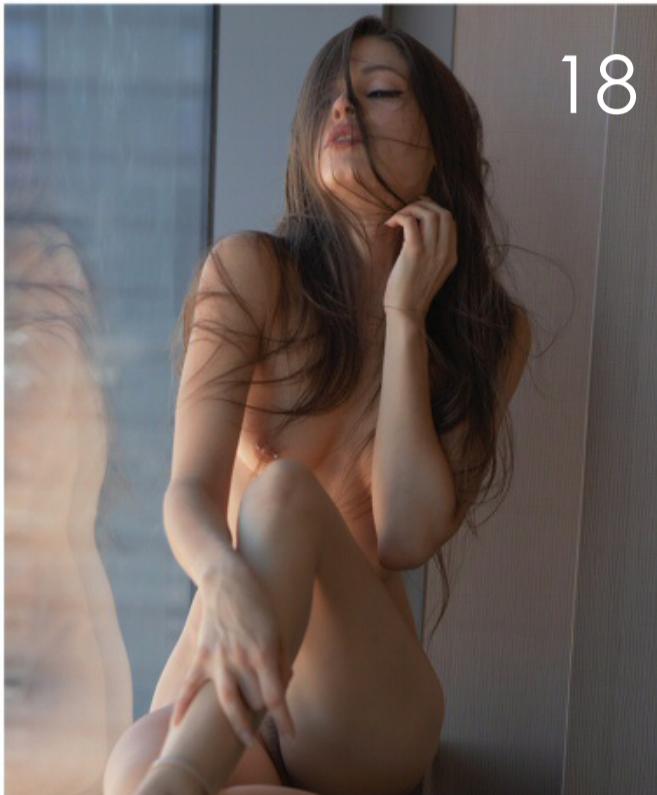
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14 - STRIPLVHEALTH

Power posing is a self-improvement technique or in which people stand in a posture that they mentally associate with being powerful, hoping to feel and behave more assertively. Promoters say that people can foster positive life changes by merely assuming a "powerful" or "expansive" posture for a few minutes before an interaction in which confidence is needed.



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16 - STRIPLVDINING

Vegas Food Nerd reviews 2 Las Vegas favorites Forte European Tapas and DW Bistro.

18 - MIKA LOVELY - LOVELY BONES

Erotic model Mika Lovely featured in our magazine's pages for the second time brings the heat and inspirational art to this spectacular pictorial that is sure to get your juices flowing.

30 - KATE HUDSON - FREE SPIRIT

Free-spirited, clear-headed, and relentlessly refreshing, Kate Hudson has made a career out of playing upbeat and independent women. In-person, she charms you as much with her infectious smile as she does with her thoughtful observations on life. Flashing a big smile, Hudson is eager to answer almost any question. She is a woman very much in touch with who she is and what she wants from life.

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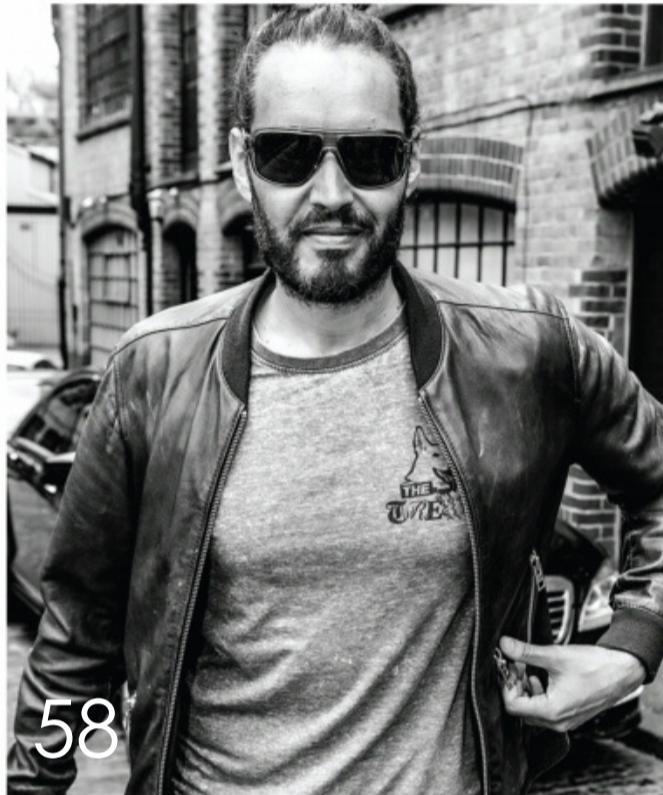


38 - INSTAGRAM CRUSH - MARCH 2021

This month's Instagram Crush features Pauline Tantot, Iman, Melinda London Sharky, Nadine Leopold and 4 more Instagram influencers for your pleasure.

40 - CHLOE AMOUR - TASTES LIKE CANDY

Las Vegas resident Chloe Amour is back with a vengeance in this clean and on-point photo feature showcasing her all-natural body, sumptuous curves, and always eyes and face.

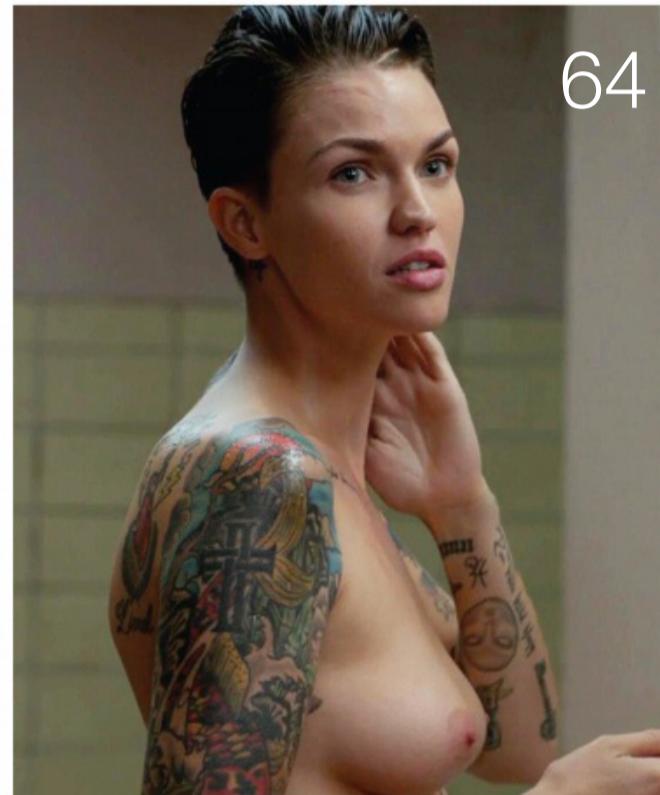


56 - STRIPLV TRENDING

This month's trending section features Michael Jackson's Neverland ranch, Gibson's new guitar app, and Stacey Duncan, Jenna Ivory, Paris Amour and Jeanie Marie Sullivan.

58 - RUSSELL BRAND - TRUTH

Animated, enthused, and possessing a level of zest and zeal for life that never seems to subside, Russell Brand is known for embracing even the banalest subjects in pursuit of what he deems "enlightenment." And yet, totally, he's in a slightly more serious mood. He wants to discuss truth, the mainstream media, the faith we have in the next generation, and fishing.

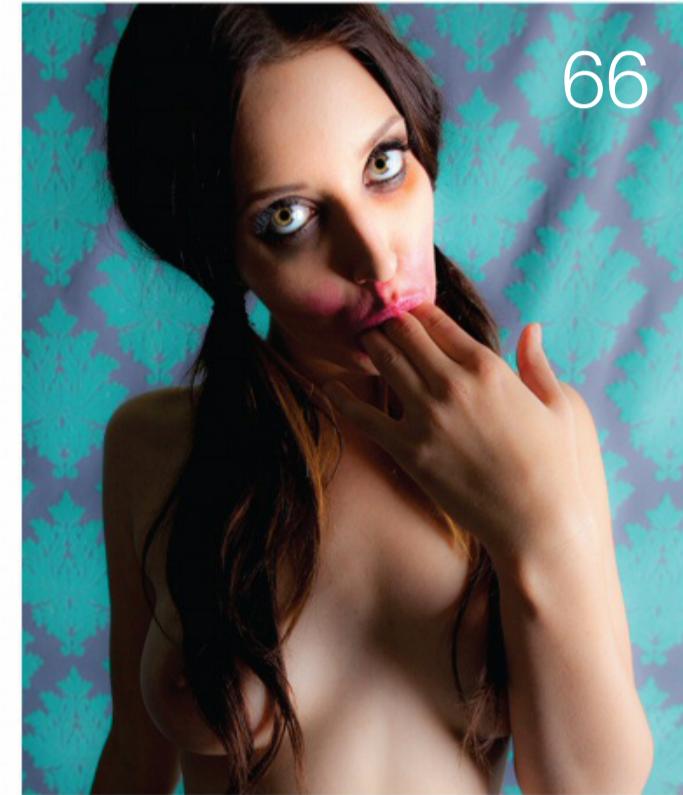


64 - MR. SKIN'S TOP 10 HOTTEST AUSTRALIAN CELEBRITY'S

Mr. Skin celebrated Australia Day on January 26 by checking out what's "down under" our favorite Aussie celebrity's clothes. From Oscar nominees like Toni Collette and Margot Robbie to breakout TV sensations like Phoebe Tonkin and Bella Heathcote, these ten ladies might be the hottest Australian exports of all time. So whether it's Australia Day or just a regular day, these saucy Aussies will have you crying out, "Crikey. What a beauty."

66 - KIMBERLY KANE - MAMA'S LITTLE HELPERS

Kimberly Kane plays a mad animated crazy to Santodonato's camera and vision in this fucked up kinky pictorial.



76 - HOMUNCULUS

A fiction short-story by Byron Craft from his book *Shoggoth 2 - Rise of the Elders*.

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Tommy Devito - Founding member and lead guitarist of the pop group "The Four Seasons".

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LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

Hopefully, when this issue lands in your hands, we are truly on the other side of this insanity. I know many of you are having a hard time right now. The global upheaval is just unbelievable. It's hurting businesses, relationships, and so many aspects of our lives. The world may not ever go back to the way it was before all of this happened. But I encourage you to look at all of this uncertainty as an opportunity. Some of our time's biggest and most successful companies, like mega tech giant Apple launched during a declining economy like we are living in currently. Instead of letting the stress of the times get to you and bring you down, decide today that you are done with settling. Screw settling. Create and manifest your dreams; now is the time.

You don't have to let the external world control you. The most successful people fail the most. So why not set a dream goal and go for it right now. A dream becomes a reality when you put a schedule to it. Taking massive action is the cure-all. Take action to do things in your own life right now. What do you have to lose? Take action in your own life to be the change that will catapult you to your new future. Thanks again to you for helping to bring my crazy dreams to reality. This magazine would not be possible otherwise. Dare greatly, and great things will happen.

Enjoy the issue,



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THE HUNT FOR

LITTLE RED & GREEN HORNET



SOUGHT-AFTER VEHICLES

Little Red and Green Hornet are two mythological prototype Shelby Mustangs that were once lost but now found and restored to their original glory. Many car fans were sure these cars had been destroyed decades ago and lost forever – even more people questioned they had ever existed. Excess sheet metal from both vehicles have been built into the design of our newest and extremely limited time-piece collection.

Both cars belonged to and were driven by legendary automotive designer and race driver Carroll Shelby.

LITTLE RED is a one-off experimental 1967 Prototype Shelby Mustang GT500 EXP Coupe. She was ordered by Carroll Shelby when he returned from the Le Mans in 1966 with Ford's first overall win and became his R&D car.

Countless enthusiasts and experts have searched for Little Red since she went missing in the 1960s, but it wasn't until March 3rd, 2018 she was discovered in rural North Texas by a team led by car collector Craig Jackson.

GREEN HORNET is a one-off 1968 Shelby GT500 EXP Coupe. She was an experimental styling car with Shelby scoops and a rear spoiler. The car was given to Carroll Shelby by Ford. He started experimenting on the car with the newest tech that Ford was secretly working on electronic fuel injection, making the apple green Mustang way ahead of its time.



REC WATCHES

A NEW GENERATION OF THE ICONIC P-51 TIMEPIECE

REC Watches has gone to extraordinary means to find unique artifacts and put these into a brand new timepiece. They keep the patina and build the watch to represent the vehicle. There wasn't much excess sheet metal to work with for REC Watches, but there was enough to build these unique watches in very limited numbers.

RED watch

When they started working on the design in early 2019, they had two overall goals: They wanted the design to reflect its mythological siblings and create a watch that stands on its own. Secondly, they wanted to create something more wearable for all wrist sizes and therefore downscaled the size to 42 mm.

Creating a watch that honors the design of the most iconic Mustang ever built has been one of their most significant challenges yet. A true Mustang enthusiast will immediately recognize all the small design references, whereas a watch fan will appreciate the latest collection's masculine and original design. \$1695, available at recwatches.com.



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LIFE INTERRUPTED: PLANTING THE PTSD SEED THROUGH CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

By Brian Ross

I was born in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, but my parents are from Canada. My dad left a successful family business and moved us down to Florida because he had caught a severe case of pneumonia. He needed to live in a warmer climate to survive.

My dad was a pretty intense guy. He was really dominant and reactive toward my older brothers and me. From what I remember, my mom just stayed out of it. I don't think he found the happiness and success he was hoping for once we moved. Sometimes it seemed as if he took his insecurities out on my brothers and me physically and emotionally.

Most of the time, the episodes with my dad were just verbal. He'd often yell in a threatening manner about something I did or didn't do well enough. However, on some occasions, they became physical altercations. Some of those would leave marks; on a couple of occasions, I recall they required stitches. Every time this happened, it left me feeling small and demeaned.

When I was seven, I brought home a bad progress report with some D's on it. I was struggling to settle into my new environment and a new school. My dad explained he didn't want a bad progress report to turn into a bad report card. His punishment was making me pull down my pants and giving me a spanking just before I left for school each morning for an entire week. I would pull up my pants, grab my books and lunch box, and walk to school with my new neighborhood friends feeling frazzled, scared, and confused by what had just happened. The hope of each new day that week was dismantled by this action each morning. My undeveloped child brain had already moved onto a new moment, and my dad's action would hurl me back into the trauma—this time without context because it was a new day. How did my dad think this was a good idea?

My oldest brother, David, who is almost ten years older than me, moved out at around age eighteen with plans of marriage and a new life. My other brother, Brad, was forced to move out after having a physical altercation with my dad. He defended me after my dad lost his temper and threw me into a door casing and wounded my head, resulting in a few stitches. This left me alone at age nine to deal with my dad with no buffer from my brothers.

By the time I was a young teenager, I struggled with my relationship with my father. It was stressful for me most of the time. He was unpredictable, on edge, and angry.

Unexpectedly, one afternoon when I was at the beach surfing with some friends, my fifty-four-year-old father passed away. Later, we discovered that hemochromatosis, a rare condition in which the body absorbs too much iron, was likely the

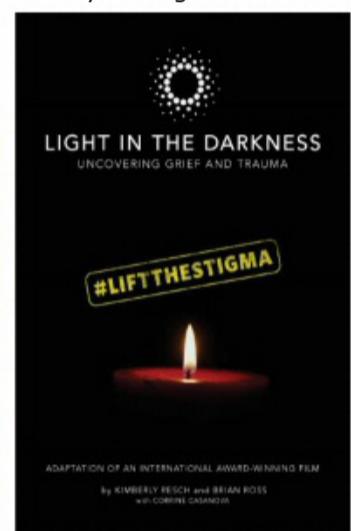
cause of his untimely death.

Before he died, I remember wishing he would die so I didn't have to deal with the pain anymore. On this day, he did. I wondered if my thoughts of wishing him dead caused it to happen. This guilt has been a part of my adult narrative. I most likely didn't process the trauma from that day properly. I didn't know how. I wasn't given a manual.

What I've learned as a father has guided me in the opposite direction as a disciplinarian. I have a much more docile demeanor toward my two daughters. As they grow, I continue to strengthen my communication with my daughters in a protective and serving nature. I am now open to having those tougher conversations when necessary. I have begun to question some of my thinking and actions. I continue to explore what causes or triggers me to do what I do by asking myself questions and searching for answers.

I began to wonder, What are the implications of family history regarding trauma? Was my daughter's anger somehow connected to my unresolved childhood anger? Is the way I discipline similar to or opposite of my father because of experience or genetics? Who was running the programs? My DNA or my mind? By asking these questions, I can adjust my own behavior with my children.

Find out more about author Brian Ross at consciouscontent.org



STAND UP STRAIGHT

Power posing is a self-improvement technique in which people stand in a posture that they mentally associate with being powerful, hoping to feel and behave more assertively. Promoters say that people can foster positive life changes by merely assuming a "powerful" or "expansive" posture for a few minutes before an interaction in which confidence is needed.

Power posing was first suggested in a 2010 paper by Dana R. Carney, Amy Cuddy, and Andy Yap in the journal *Psychological Science*. It came to prominence through a popular TED talk by Cuddy in 2012.

It is said that striking a powerful pose and standing up straight can increase your testosterone level by up to 20%, stress hormone cortisol levels decrease by 25%, and risk tolerance increases by 33%.

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FORTE EUROPEAN TAPAS

By Vegas Food Nerd

Tucked away in a strip mall next to a La Bonita Market, and Lee's Liquor in Las Vegas is a family run treasure that Guy Fieri featured on "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives," but that's not what makes this gem of a place stand out. It all began in 2009 when Nina Manchev opened Forte European Tapas. Originally from Sofia, Bulgaria, Nina moved to Vegas with her parents at three years of age and has stayed much to the delight of locals in the know. Nina started Forte while she was still going to college at UNLV. She saw a hole in the dining scene and decided to bring her robust family traditions to her new restaurant. Her father helps her to develop the recipes, and as Forte European Tapas has evolved, she has brought her unique flavor to the menu that celebrates dining going back to ancient times.

When you first walk into Forte European Tapas, I was struck by the quaintness of the space. The bar is inviting, and the deli and market section begs for some good foodie perusing. The seating area is an eclectic mix of fun and homey decorations. On one side is high tops, and the other is comfy cozy couch seating. It's a setting that is conducive to deep conversation, and of course a lot of eating. The walls are adorned with art, faux plants, and other wild knick-knacks that make you feel like you have temporarily left our neon city and been transported into a small café in Europe.

When we were seated, the server introduced us to the spice blend on the side of your table housed in a cool carved wooden box. She instructed us to pour some olive oil into our small plates, and then add small scoops of the spice mixture to the oil to create a delicious dip that we used as we devoured their warm bread while deciding what to order from their delightfully unfamiliar offerings.

We ordered the Thracian clay pot that Guy Fieri sampled on Triple D. Because hey, if it's good enough for that wild-haired food host, then it is good enough for us too. Then Forte's take on Beef Stroganoff, a wild mushroom pelmeni covered with a stroganoff ragu, and their Vereniki (hand-made dumplings, filled with potato, and topped with fried onions). We finished off the order with a pitcher of their white sangria. The Vereniki came out first, and it was love at first bite. There was no denying the home-made tenderness to the dumplings, and the sour cream on the side was a fresh, bright accompaniment. My favorite dish of the three came next. The beef stroganoff was a tender melt in your mouth delight. And Guy's Clay Pot? It was delicious as well, full of authentic flavors, and something I might have enjoyed more at brunch time. Which, by the way, is a reason to dedicate a Sunday to visit because it is the only day of the week that Forte serves the Spanish delight Paella.

Cheers to Chef Nina, and her family for bringing this outpost from Bulgaria to Las Vegas. Her family heritage shines through her food and entices the pallet to indulge for repeated visits. I highly suggest you experience for yourself next time you're in Vegas.



DW BISTRO

By Vegas Food Nerd

Located in the revamped and now thriving Gramercy development DW Bistro is a modern open and airy space located in the heart of this new urban landscape in the Las Vegas valley. The once-stalled development is now almost entirely leased out and has created a cool little community vibe to it. There are different sites for outdoor bonfires, an outdoor movie theater and a fitness center. There is residential living, office space and the retail spaces below them are slowly but surely filling in with some solid offerings. DW Bistro is one of them. Open for lunch and dinner as well as their very popular weekend brunches, the restaurant is a favorite for locals. Relocated from their original space in a strip mall only a few exits away from the Gramercy, the new space is bigger, and more open, making more room for the loyal fans of this establishment. Word about DW's unique New Mexico cuisine meets Jamaican has captured the taste buds of many in town, and I was looking forward to finally getting to try their food.

The space itself is striking when you walk through the door. It's modern with warm accents, and features a big long bar in the center. There are bright splashes of white and orange, and the seating sleek and filled with a few hipster types here and there. The patio is an excellent dining option when weather permits and the restaurant is located right next to the expertly landscaped central park of the Gramercy development, making for some beautiful views.

We visited this fusion restaurant for lunch one day during the week. It was the middle of the day, so we opted for their pomegranate iced tea instead of partaking from the bar. The ice tea, which you can order either sweetened, or not was bright and refreshing. Though we did happen to see a few of their legendary Bloody Mary's drifting around on various servers' trays (and they looked tempting). We started our meal with their DW Spanish chorizo and shrimp. The shrimp and chorizo were served with a fresh tomato, roasted garlic, and lemon beurre blanc sauce with basil. The dish was served with lavash and crostini. It was full of flavor, and that sauce was such a perfect medley of flavors we couldn't help but sip it after we'd eaten the shrimp and sopped up what we could with the crackers. For our entrees, my friend ordered the blackened salmon salad, and I ordered the chef recommended dish—the New Mexican pork bowl. The salad was very good with a nice balance between the sweetness in the dressing and the spice from the blackened salmon. My bowl was a generous portion. It was big tender chunks of pork that had been simmered in a New Mexican red Chile sauce served over rice, topped with two fried eggs, some micro greens and served with flour tortillas. It was a steamy, spicy, warm dish that took me back to the food I'd experienced in Santa Fe, and one of the more unique flavors I've experienced here in town.

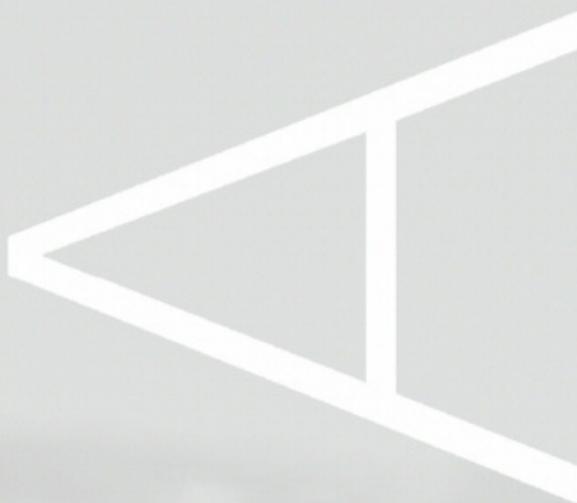
There isn't a shortage of restaurants in our fair city, but DW's unique menu offerings and the level of service we experienced on our visit rival some of the big-name restaurants on the Las Vegas Strip. When you visit, I urge you to venture off the strip to check out the many gems like this that are worth the trip. If you are ever looking for a suggestion or two feel free to reach out to me on social media for a tip or two. I'm always happy to share.

Check out more by Vegas Food Nerd at FoodNerdMag.com.



MESSIKA

PARIS



lovely bones

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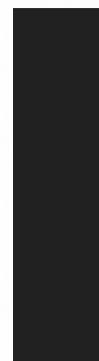






KATE HUDSON

free spirit
by skye huntington



In her various guises as a movie star, retail entrepreneur, and wellness advocate, Kate Hudson leads a very active life. She's the kind of woman whose indomitable spirit is both empowering and engaging. Drawing on the life lessons handed down to her by her mother Goldie Hawn and stepfather Kurt Russell, Hudson is unapologetically independent-minded and uninhibited.

Those are the qualities that have endeared her to audiences over the years, beginning with her breakthrough role in *Almost Famous* and then with her work in *You, Me and Dupree*, *How to Lose a Guy In Ten Days*, *Bride Wars*, *Raising Helen*, and her voiceover work in the billion-dollar *Kung Fu Panda* animated family film franchise. In recent times she ticked off a life ambition by starring with stepfather Kurt Russell in *Deepwater Horizon*; and impressed opposite the late Chadwick Boseman in *Marshall*.

In 2021 looks forward to leftfield autism-enriched drama *Music*, from the scriptwriting and songwriting pen of Sia. She also stars in the psychological drama *Mona Lisa and the Blood Moon*, due for release later in the year.

Away from acting duties, the 41-year-old has long followed in her mother's fitness footsteps. Hawn was a dancer before she became an actress, and continues to embrace a lifestyle consisting of regular exercise and healthy eating. That's what led Kate to write a wellness book, *Pretty Happy: Healthy Ways to Love Your Body*, that became a bestseller in 2016. Meanwhile, her athletic wear company, Fabletics, and her vitamin company INBLOOM have exploded into a 300 million corporate mini-empire. It's all part of her philosophy and commitment to healthy living.

Kate Hudson lives in Los Angeles with 16-year-old teenage boy Ryder, from her seven-year marriage to Black Crowes' lead singer Chris Robinson, and nine-year-old son Bingham, from her relationship with Muse frontman Matt Bellamy that abruptly ended in 2014. Since 2016 she has been dating actor Danny Fujikawa. They have a two-year-old daughter together, Rani.

Free-spirited, clear-headed, and relentlessly refreshing, Kate Hudson has made a career out of playing up-beat and independent women. In person, she charms you as much with her infectious smile as she does with her thoughtful observations on life. Flashing a big smile, Hudson is eager to answer almost any question. She is a woman very much in touch with who she is and what she wants from life.

STRIPLV: What was it like working with such a creative tour de force as Sia in *Music*?

HUDSON: She is incredible. So much energy, so much creativity. I think what I admire most about Sia is she isn't afraid to look stupid – that's the opposite of most people, particularly most in the movie industry. People are terrified of looking stupid and, the more they go on, the greater the defenses they put up so they can avoid anything that will tarnish their reputation. Sia seems to go completely the other way. It's like she wants to constantly dare herself to step even further outside of her comfort zone – she is pushing her instinct to hold back to the absolute extremes and always ends up breaking through that barrier. It's probably no surprise then that the best work she does is always the most recent work. That totally follows.

STRIPLV: Did any of her rub off on you?

HUDSON: It can't not – she is that much an inspirational, creatively infectious person. By the time we'd gone through initial rehearsals, I could just feel a huge wave of confidence come across me. I think everyone involved in the project could. She makes you think anything is possible, and from that always comes great results.

STRIPLV: And you were even happy to shave your head for the experience?

HUDSON: Well, it fitted the role. You know you have to invest in something fully. And that seems so long ago now. We filmed it in 2017, and for various reasons, it has taken a while to come through to fruition. It's exciting to think it's close now, and I guess I am happy to have all my hair back!

STRIPLV: Are you more comfortable acting with your all, as it were?

HUDSON: Yes and no. A film like *Music* was really good for me because I'm not a big fan when it comes to watching myself in movies.

STRIPLV: Really. Why?

HUDSON: I really don't like it. I pull these faces and weird expressions. I'm literally sitting there, staring in absolute horror between my fingers sometimes, crying, stop it, stop doing that! I'm not down with that at all. (Laughs) I literally start screaming and shaking. I don't like it, but this felt like a whole different thing. It was great.

STRIPLV: Sia left a big impression, but who has been your favorite or most memorable person to work with?

HUDSON: Bill Murray has always been one of my heroes. He is a very thoughtful actor, and sometimes he's incredibly goofy out there on the set, having fun and making everyone feel so good and comfortable to be there, then in the next moment, he will be very focussed and intense.

He also makes great acting choices, and it was a pleasure to work with him. Bill is such a brilliant comedian that you just love watching him work more than anything else, and getting the chance to hang around him was such a pleasure.

STRIPLV: You've spoken about feeling more carefree at this point in your life than you ever did in your twenties or thirties?

HUDSON: I have a much greater sense of inner freedom. That comes with accepting everything that life throws at you and not trying to impose your own expectations on everything. That was an important change in my thinking, and it's given me so much more confidence as a woman and as a mother. You don't put yourself in the position of always trying to have things conform to your way of thinking, and instead, you learn to adapt and move forward in a much better way.

STRIPLV: And that logic inspired you to write your book, *Pretty Happy: Healthy Ways to Love Your Body*?

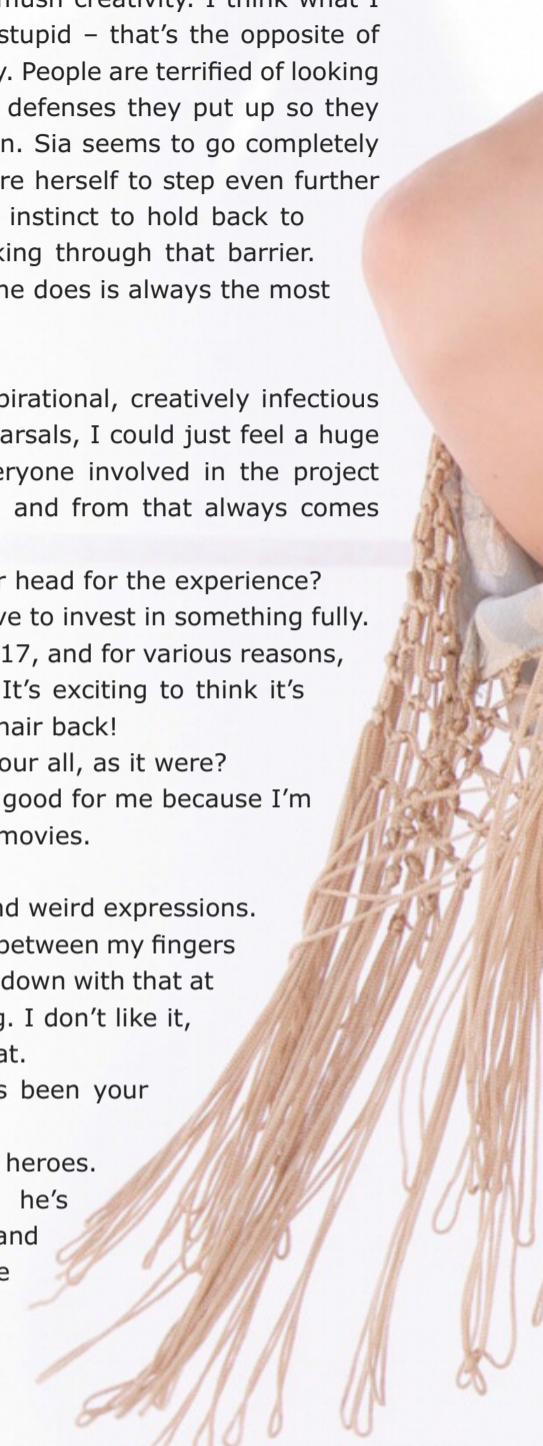
HUDSON: That's part of it. The basic message involves empowering women and inspiring confidence about how we can build our lives in a more positive and healthy way. I wanted to deal with basic questions that women are facing today. There are so many expectations we have to deal with in terms of how we look, how we're supposed to juggle work and children, and the kind of mom we're supposed to be. We have a lot of issues regarding how we see ourselves and how much we worry about living up to our own expectations, and how our role in society has changed.

STRIPLV: Your work on female empowerment has always been admirable.

HUDSON: I wouldn't go that far. What I would say is I've discovered that there are so many women out there who are looking for basic encouragement and motivation to get their lives together. We're all sisters on that level. We need to feel free and passionate about what we do in life.

STRIPLV: One of the things that people appreciate about you is that you have this very vigorous, healthy kind of appearance. Have you always been very big on physical fitness?

HUDSON: I've always liked to do a lot of sports and stay fit. It's so important to me to live a healthy lifestyle. I loved trying to keep up with my brothers, and I loved playing football with them as much as I loved taking dance classes. Exercise











is so important when it comes to giving you more energy overall. Being active is not just something that benefits your body, but it also improves your mental well-being. Fitness is all about staying active, and there's a big connection between mental and physical health. If we live a more conscious life, if we stay fit and eat better, we're going to have a more optimistic and beautiful life.

STRIPLV: You started taking ballet and jazz classes several years ago. What made you interested in that?

HUDSON: My mother was a dancer before she got into acting, and the kind of work you put into dancing is so intense, and it does so much to tone your body. It's one of the best things I've ever done for my body. It's always difficult to change your life and try to become more active. There will be days when you will not feel so good and days when you will not achieve what you want. That's okay. That's why there's no point in signing up at the gym for things you don't like to do. If you prefer outdoor sports, then walk, run, or ride a bike. If it motivates you to be part of a team, then find a sport where you can be involved with other people. The main thing is that you have fun!

STRIPLV: Do you have any guilty pleasures when it comes to food?

HUDSON: I love Hawaiian pizza, but in general, I'm pretty lucky because I've always enjoyed eating fruits and vegetables. And whenever I go out with friends to eat at a restaurant, I never worry about calories. You have to be able to indulge once in a while and not always worry about what you eat. I think the best thing is to stay active and eat healthy as a general way of being. Then you won't need to diet.

STRIPLV: Do your sons share your passion for fitness?

HUDSON: Oh, yeah! My sons will often join me when I'm doing my workouts at home. My brother and I also like to train together. He will bring his trainer to my house, and we have such a good time working out. That makes a really fun kind of occasion.

STRIPLV: What is the new vision behind Fabletics?

HUDSON: It's the same as the old vision, a company that promotes fitness and an active lifestyle, especially for women. I believe in female empowerment, and my company's message is about setting your own goals because it should be about what makes you happy. I always wanted to be part of something where the message would have a greater impact than what would come from designing a clothing line. So I wanted to bring a fashion perspective to athletic wear because as a dancer, I wear that stuff all the time, and there was never a place to buy clothes like that. I wanted to have a product that inspires a healthier lifestyle and motivates women to leading a healthier lifestyle and getting involved in wellness. Fabletics has grown so fast, and I've had to become much more involved than I expected simply because I've needed to learn a lot more about the business, and it takes a lot more of your time when you're expanding. That means if I'm going to make a movie, it has to be something that I really want to do if it means being away from my kids and my family and friends for any length of time. When I have to be on a set at 5:30 in the morning, I never want to be thinking, "What am I doing here when I could be making my kids breakfast and then taking them to school?"

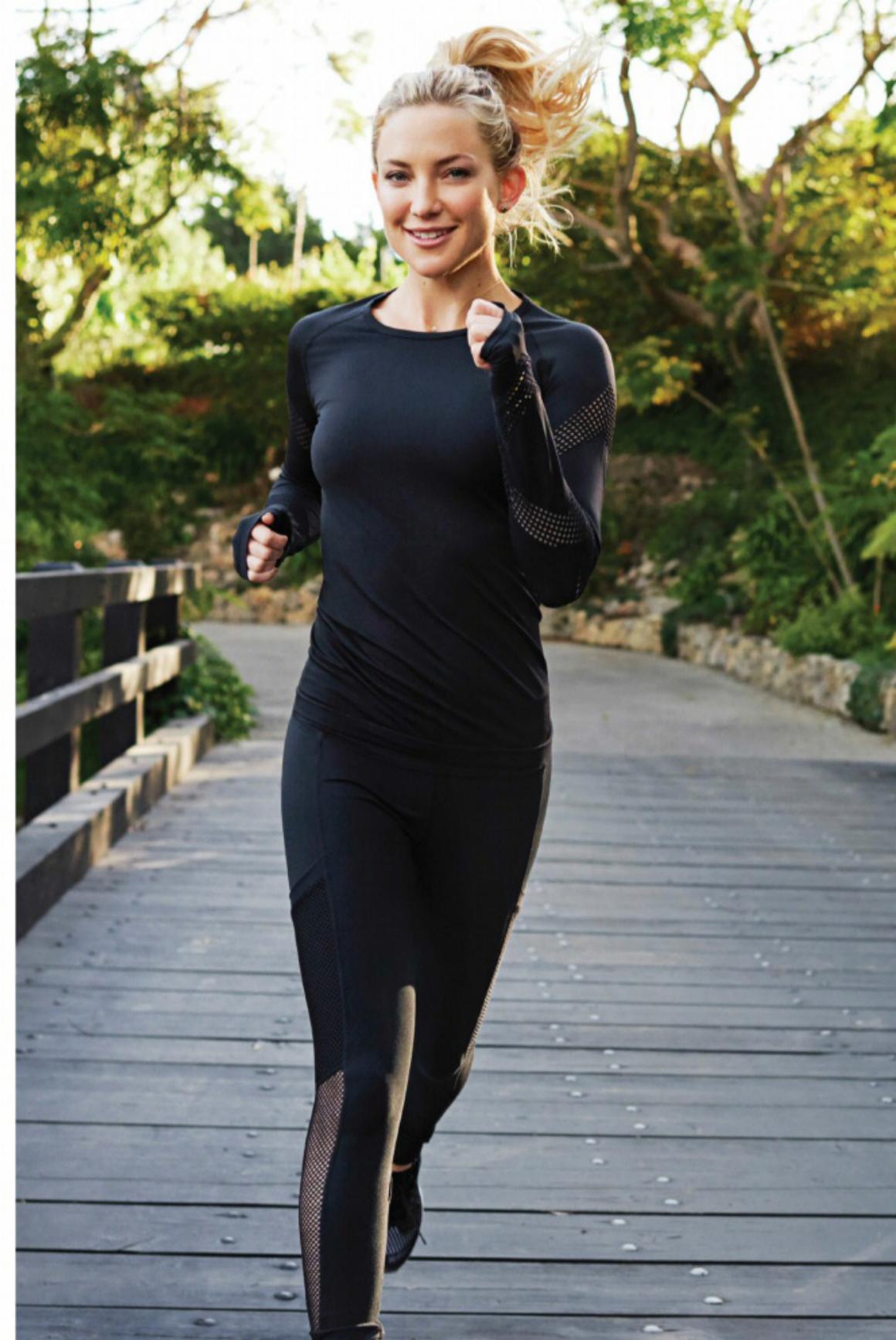
STRIPLV: Do you think they'll follow your footsteps?

HUDSON: Honestly, if I'm to predict, I'd say it will actually be music where they'll find their voice, so to speak. Ryder, he knows everything and everyone when it comes to music. It's shocking. I'm like, "who, what, where?" How can this be? I'm such a fossil. (Laughs) No, I'm mom. Yeah, I'd say he will be this amazing DJ.

STRIPLV: You've often credited your parents, Goldie Hawn and Kurt Russell, for instilling an active lifestyle mentality in you, right?

HUDSON: We were always a very outdoorsy kind of family. We moved from L.A. to Colorado (where Kurt and Goldie owned a sprawling house on the outskirts of Aspen), and it was such a beautiful environment. They created a very happy and harmonious home life for us, and I've tried to bring that same kind of atmosphere to the way I've raised my own children. I grew up riding dirt bikes, going hiking, and enjoying being in nature. I think that kind of experience stays with you all your life and I've always loved to do those kinds of activities. It's second nature to me.

STRIPLV: What kind of life lessons did your parents impart to you? Who has been the most significant influence on you?



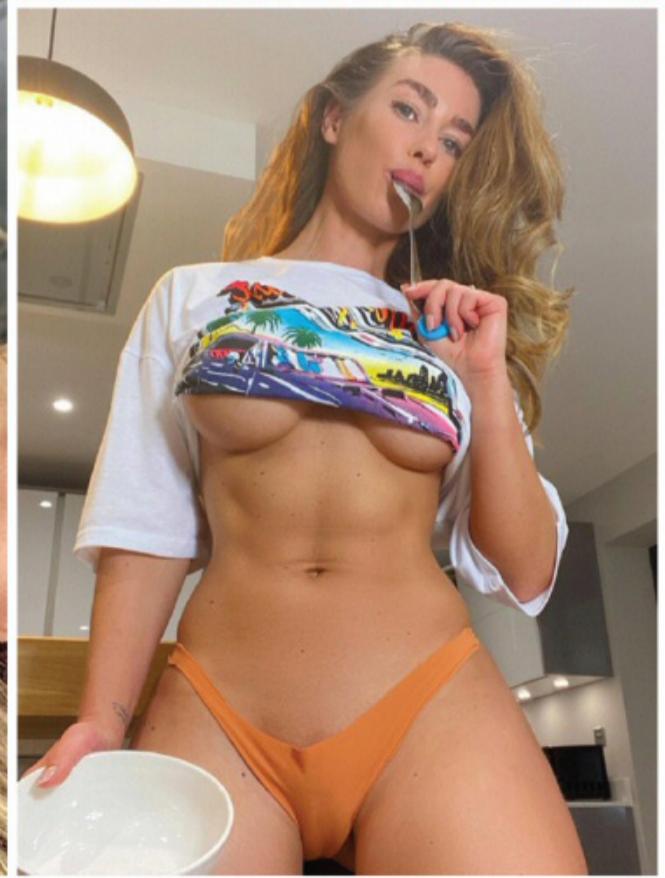
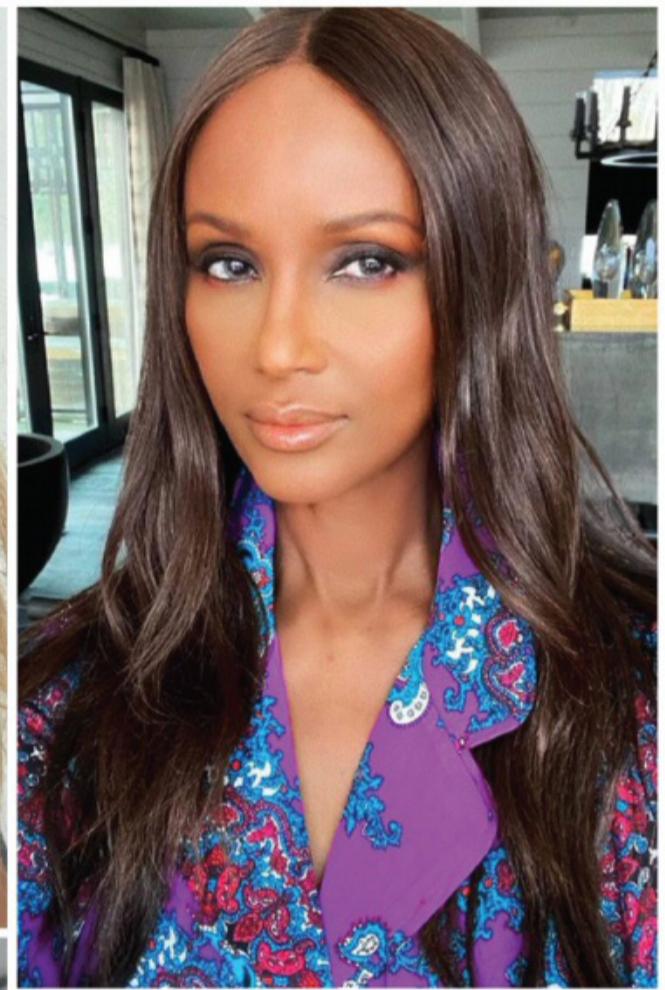
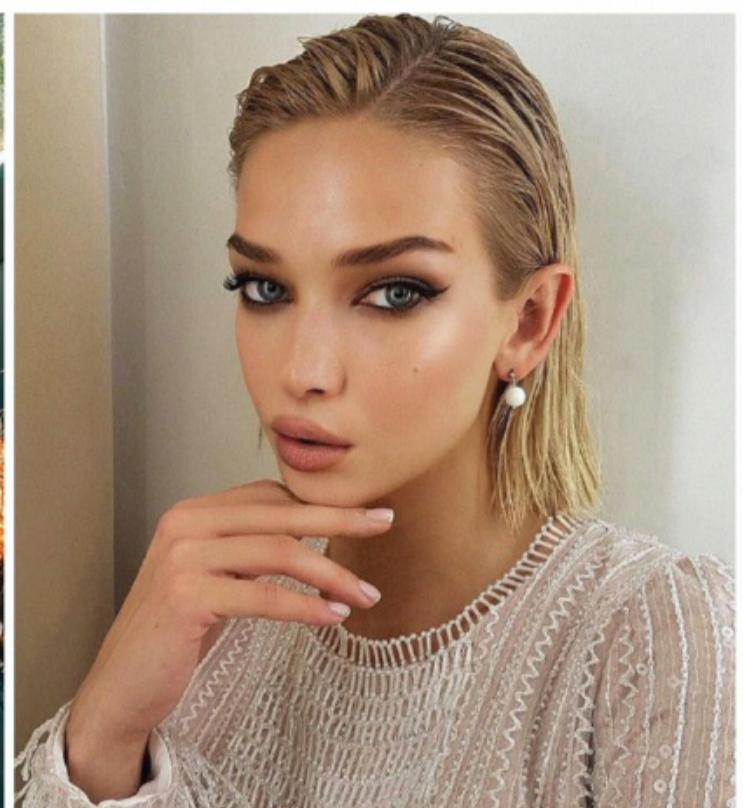
HUDSON: In terms of my personality, I think my mother's optimistic nature and energetic spirit has been a huge factor in how I look at things. She's also a very sensitive and caring person, much more than the public would ever be aware of because she's known more as a comedienne, and I think that's also a big part of who I am. My mother has taught me the importance of not taking things too seriously and to try to be very open and free-spirited. Instead of letting things get you down, my mother thinks you need to learn to laugh even in bad times. I really believe in that. She's a great woman, and she always inspires me. She's been my rock and has taught me so much about life.

STRIPLV: What about your father, Kurt?

HUDSON: Pa (her way of referring to her stepdad Kurt Russell) has always been the realist in the family. He has a very pragmatic way of looking at the world, and he expects you to work hard, be polite, and have a strong sense of responsibility. My mother also believes in that. I think those values have helped me a lot over the course of my career. I'm very lucky to have grown up with such loving parents. Pa has a very pragmatic and clear perspective on things that teaches you not to waste time or worry about unimportant things. My mom has a very free-spirited nature, but Kurt is a realist. They were always there for me and my brother and were always very attentive. I like to think I'm the same way with my children. They weren't at all-controlling, and they really didn't place a lot of expectations on me or my brother Oliver. We were taught to be kind, caring, and generous and to live very openly and honestly. But I also appreciated how hard-working and disciplined both my parents were, and that's also been a very important influence on me. I've always believed in the kind of solid work ethic they shared.

STRIPLV: Can you share any one particular piece of advice that your parents may have imparted to you?

HUDSON: After I had my first son, Ryder, Pa told me not to place too many expectations on my son. He said if you do that, he will never live up to them. From the moment he said that to me, I understood that I should not try to plan the lives of my children before they live it. One big theme that's always in my head is the idea of acceptance and how families need to come together and not try to stand apart from each other.



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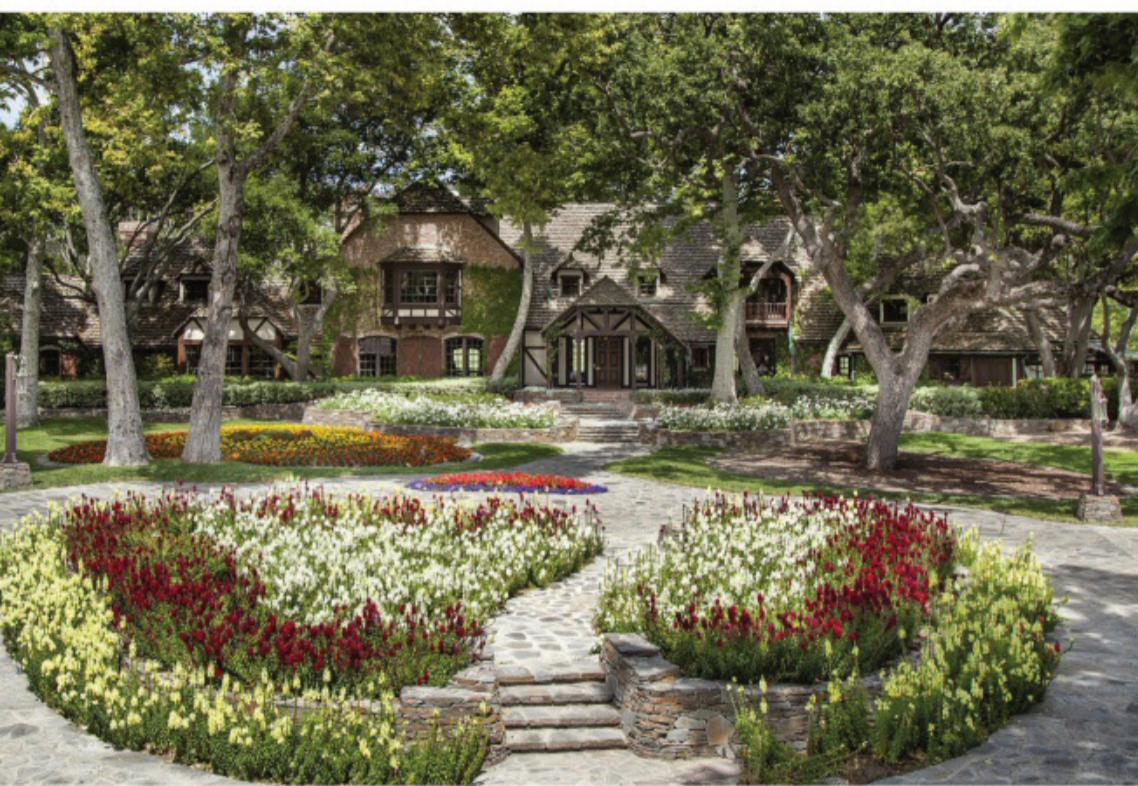












MICHAEL JACKSON'S NEVERLAND RANCH FINALLY SOLD FOR \$22 MILLION - A \$78 MILLION REDUCTION FROM THE ORIGINAL \$100 MILLION ASK.

No longer the wicked real estate stepmother that has been on the market since 2015, Michael Jackson's storied 2,700-acre Neverland Ranch has, at long last, sold for \$22 million - a \$78 million reduction from the original ask.

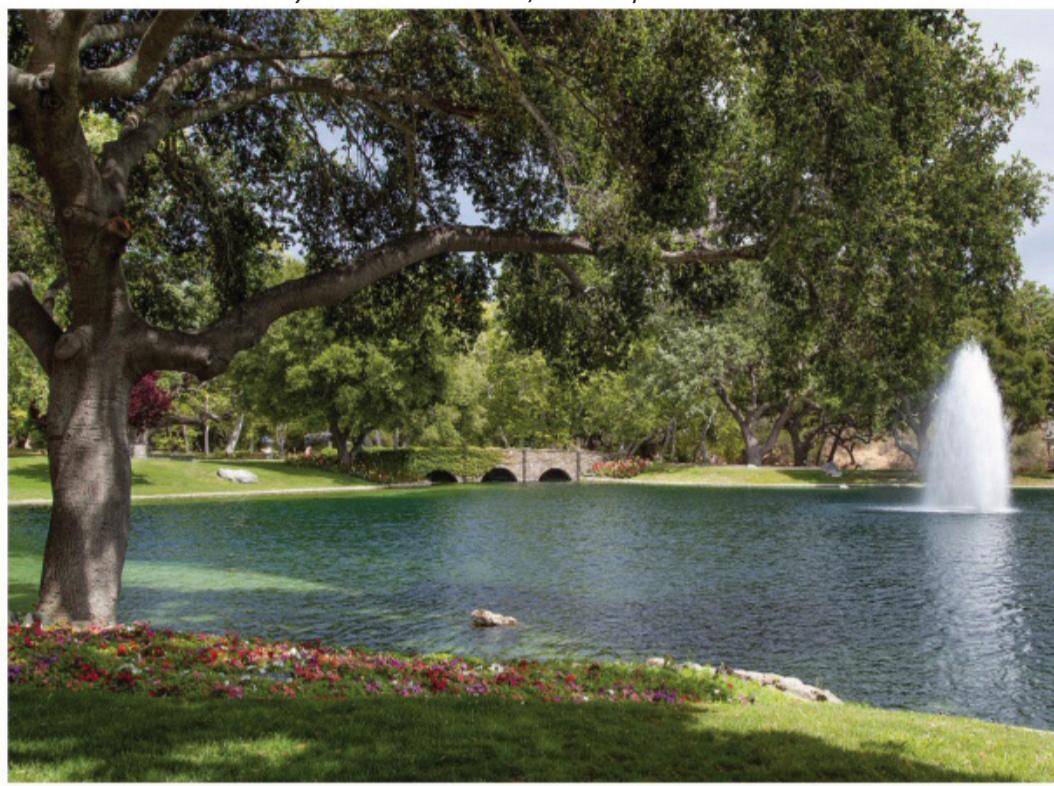
Michael designed Neverland as the childhood amusement park he wished he could have grown up in Gary, Indiana. One of ten children born to a steel-worker father who was also a part-time-musician, and a stay-at-home mother who had country singing aspirations, Neverland had everything to fascinate a child: carnival rides, an electric train ride, and a plethora of zoo animals. After his death in 2009, the ranch was stripped of every reminder of Jackson's tenure there and renamed Sycamore Valley Ranch, its former name. It was put on the market in 2015 at an initial price of \$100 million.



Located on the edge of a national forest, Jackson first saw the ranch in 1983 when he visited Paul McCartney, who was staying there while filming a video. In 1988, Jackson purchased the ranch from land-developer William Bone. Bone had bought Sycamore Valley Ranch in 1981, moved in with his family, and worked with architect Robert Altevers to design all of the buildings from ideas Bone was unable to use in his real estate business.

Today, the buildings consist of the 12,000-square-foot main house, a four-bedroom guest house, a two-bedroom guest house, several barns, animal shelter facilities and a maintenance shop. The main house, designed in French Normandy style, has large rooms including formal living and dining, multiple fireplaces, and a chef's kitchen which can also be used for large functions. There are six bedrooms: a two-story master suite with a fireplace in the sitting room, two large baths and cedar walk-in closets. One of the closets contains a hidden safe room. Grounds include a free-form swimming pool, a large covered barbecue area, basketball court, tennis court, and a 50-seat movie theater with a private balcony and stage. The four-acre lake also has a fountain.

The ranch was purchased by billionaire-businessman Ron Burkle, who was a former associate of Jackson. Burkle built his fortune by buying and selling grocery store chains and is invested in U.K. and U.S. talent agencies. He has purchased several other unique homes, including Bob Hope's spaceship-looking home in Palm Springs and Frank Lloyd Wright's Mayan-Revival Ennis House in Los Angeles. Burkle is also part owner of the National Hockey League's Pittsburgh Penguins. *For more celebrity home news and celebrity home video tours, visit TopTenRealEstateDeals.com.*



GIBSON LAUNCHES EPIC NEW GUITAR APP

Whether you are a beginner looking to learn how to play the guitar or an expert needing guitar inspiration, most guitarists must "connect their own dots" across a wide array of tools, learning platforms, and connections to find their favorite songs and artists until now. In January, Gibson launched the epic new Gibson App with the perfect balance of innovation, information, and inspiration for guitarists at all levels. The Gibson app comes complete with a versatile guitar tuner, an innovative learning method, and an excellent selection of songs to jam along with to bring learning to another level. And it does not stop there. Gibson also connects the essentials with the new Gibson App by adding the award-winning Gibson TV channel, the impressive Virtual Guitar Tech service, and a direct connection to Gibson.com.

At the center of the new Gibson App is the game-changing, disruptive audio augmented reality (AR) technology. Developed in partnership with Zoundio, a music technology company based in Stockholm, Sweden, the Gibson App uses AR to interact with players for a two-way, engaging, interactive, and immersive guitar-learning experience that, until now, did not exist. The AR responds to and then directs the player, turning the guided step-by-step lessons guitar lessons into an easy, empowering, and fun experience. All you need to get started is the Gibson App, an acoustic or electric guitar, and your favorite pair of headphones.

The Gibson app covers electric and acoustic guitar players in multiple genres and styles, from beginner to pro guitarist. Players learn how to keep lessons short and set an effective guitar practice schedule to meet their goals. New features are added to the Gibson app every month.

"Our focus over the past few years has been all about our obsession with guitars, our connection with artists, and on re-building our iconic brands of Gibson, Epiphone, and Kramer," says James "JC" Curleigh, President and CEO of Gibson Brands. "Now it's time to bring guitar playing to life for the current and next generation of guitarists in a modern, comprehensive, and intuitive way."

"There has never been a better time to learn how to play guitar or to improve your guitar skills with all of the amazing tools available, but it can still be confusing and a little intimidating," says Cesar Gueikian of Gibson. "So, we set out to create the Gibson experience, centered around real insights, innovation, and simple intuition all delivered through one app, the new Gibson App. Early feedback has been inspiring, and we are excited to take this next step into even more guitar solutions from Gibson."

"The Gibson App is one giant love letter to anyone wanting to learn guitar or improve their playing skills from anywhere," says Daniel Katzenellenbogen, CEO of Zoundio. "The Gibson App allows anyone to pick up a guitar wherever they are and get an energized experience in their first lesson. We teach beginners without making them feel like beginners, which is a very powerful thing. Put your headphones on and get going!" \$14.99 per month, check it out at the Apple app store or at Google Play.

SOCIAL MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



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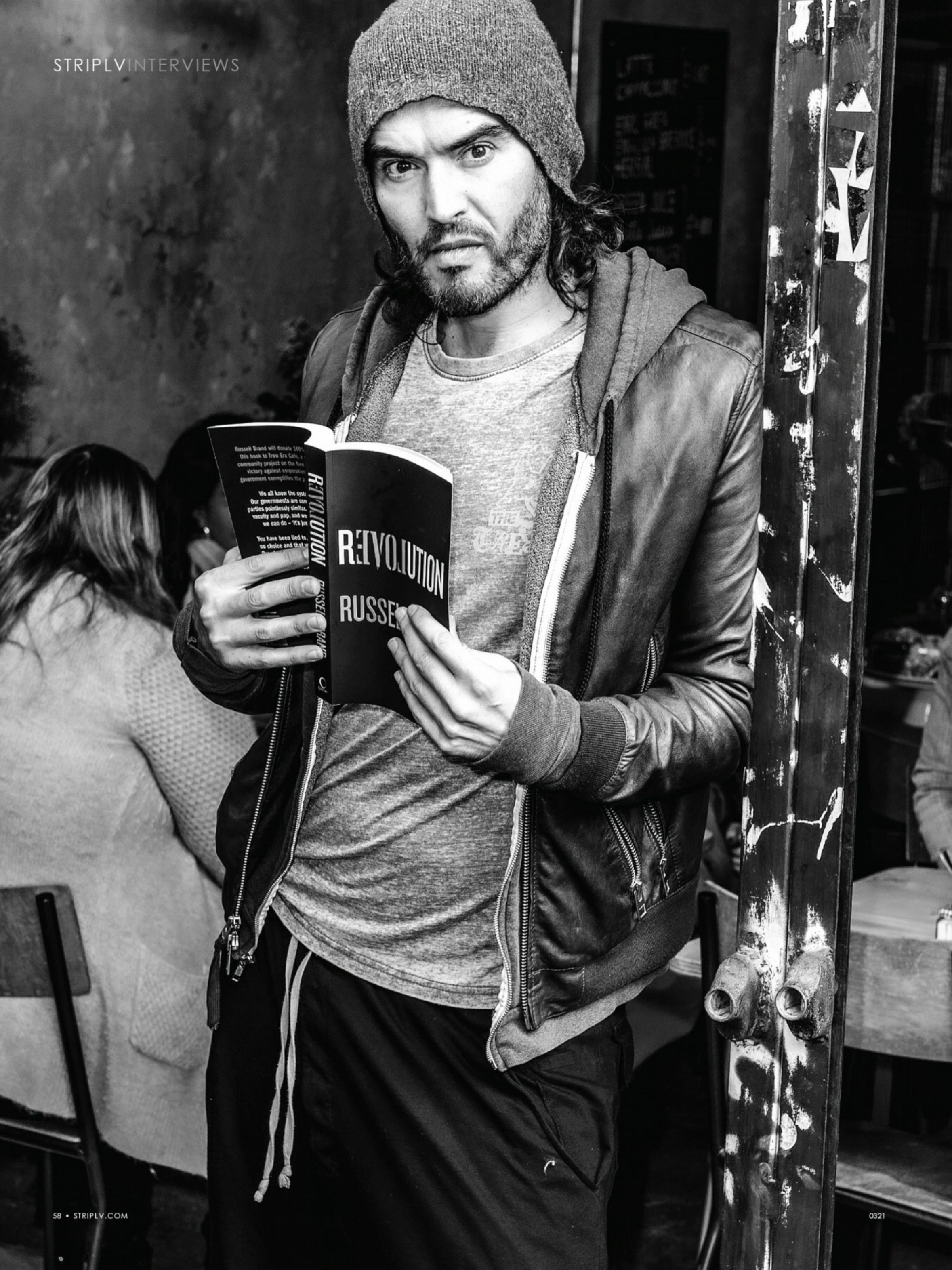
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RUSSELL BRAND

TRUTH

by frank ariveso

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nimated,

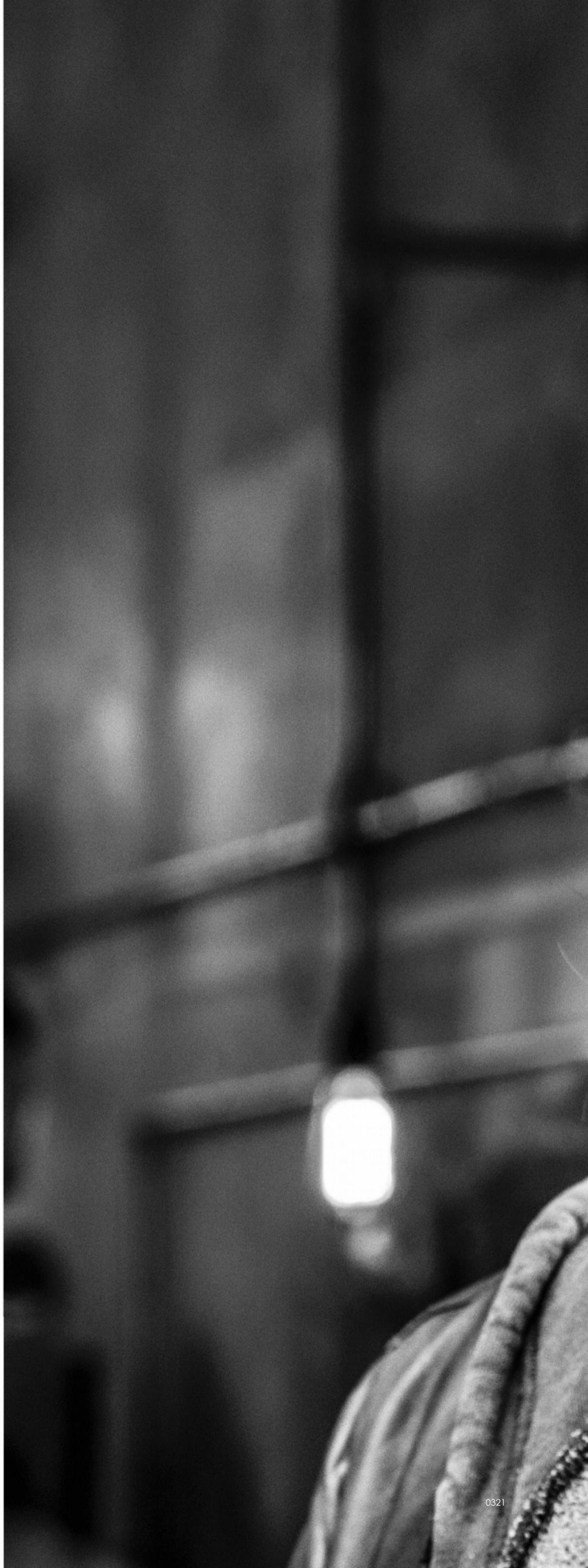
enthused, and possessing a level of zest and zeal for life that never seems to subside, Russell Brand is known for embracing even the banalest subjects in pursuit of what he deems “enlightenment.” And yet, totally, he’s in a slightly more serious mood. He wants to discuss truth, the mainstream media, the faith we have in the next generation. And fishing.

Brand’s search for exactness has taken him from the drug dens of inner London to the floodlit expanses of LA, gathering and nurturing a fanbase addicted to the writer and comedian’s slightly skewed, often controversial, and always candid take on the world.

The 45-year-old has put his name to several projects in recent years, with the web channel *The Trews* looking to be true to its word in unveiling an understanding of what’s going on in the world away from the bias of MSM or social media.

And more recently, his *Under the Skin* podcasts have delved deep into the human psyche in unraveling the mental landscapes that shape our thoughts and actions.

In one sense, you feel Brand is gradually getting to a place of comprehension. Over four decades of painstaking research will soon harbor genuine lightbulb moments that the orator can share with an intent and admiring audience. And yet, on the other hand, as he spins, twists, and diverts between ideas, theories and philosophies, Brand seems as far away from a conclusion as he ever was, and he quite likes that.





STRIPLV: Tell me about this pursuit of the truth and, ultimately, how you believe our understanding of it is shaped?

BRAND: I think the truth is further away than ever before. I feel we have categorically failed to serve and to service ourselves with the truth, and as a result, we are lost either in a sea of untruth or a cloud of uncertainty. Neither is good, and neither ultimately will help us get to the place we want to be.

STRIPLV: Which is where?

BRAND: Which is peace. That's all the human condition craves, peace. Peace means happiness, but it means security, fulfillment, nourishment, pleasure. If you have all those things, you don't strive for anything else in life. The reality, of course, is that very few of us have peace in any recognizable sense. We are all striving for the next thing. It's only when we get to our mid-nineties, and we're laying there on our death beds, and we go, "Ah yeah, actually, I needn't have kept pursuing all that pointless shit for all those years, because it didn't make me happy after all."

"The time I was happiest was that afternoon when I went fishing in 1997. Fishing, I mean, of all things that it could have been, and it was a fishing rod that connected me to utopia. A fucking fishing rod." I think that's how it goes. It makes humans appear largely stupid for our drive towards this delicious elixir, but we can't help ourselves. None of us can.

STRIPLV: So how do we go about protecting ourselves from things that aren't true? It seems so difficult now.

BRAND: You're right. It's very difficult to access the truth. Most of the things you have been told are by people who have an agenda. Big businesses and the media are in alliance with one another, governments too, and it's very hard to get the truth. The thing is, if we're smart, we can begin to detect what clearly isn't right. The task at hand is to not just accept it and move on. It's to do something about it. It's like when you're watching TV with your mate, and you go, "That's fucking bullshit what he just said," that person is just saying that because he's got money invested in it or he's sticking up for his mate. You see, while social media serves to inflame, exaggerate and perpetuate these untruths, it's also the best weapon we have to call out the bullshit, so we need to utilize it and use it for that. We need to call out a lot of stuff for how crap it is. When I did my TV show in America, I went into the break by saying, "Don't buy any of these products. If you needed them, they wouldn't have to do these little films convincing you to buy him them." The producers asked me to stop it pretty quickly. (Laughs)

STRIPLV: The same goes for the gossip columns, I guess, which is where a lot of your column inches come from.

BRAND: Well, they are the worst of the lot, but you end up not caring. It's all just gossip and hullabaloo, like a giddy, wild soup of nonsense, half-true lies, madness. If people want to reach that, fine; if they want to believe it, equally fine. But, you won't find yourself in any useful place at the end of it. It's just a big veil of madness on top of reality.

STRIPLV: So, is MSM the enemy nowadays?

BRAND: Well, mainstream media is only giving us what we demand or what we think we should demand. If there wasn't an appetite for all that salacious bollocks, then the Mail Online wouldn't publish it. So yes, the MSM are our enemies, but in a way, our enemies are within our own selfishness and our own greed, and our own ego. The organizations and individuals that most exemplify that selfishness are there based on our own invitation. They continually blast you with fear and desire. You're not good enough. You don't look right. You should be better looking; if you buy this car, if you buy these trainers, if you turn against this political party. Outside of that, you have enemies in the form of major corporations that are destroying the planet simply for profit. The reason they do it is the same reason I do selfish things, or you do selfish things. On those occasions when we are sometimes awakened to the true reality, that is when we have to come together to bring about a different type of consciousness so that the people that are currently in power are forced to change the way they behave. So that's bringing an end to economic inequality. We have to end all forms of racial bias and segregation, and we have to, most importantly of all, arrest the ongoing annihilation of the planet and recognize that we are just temporary custodians here for a fleeting moment before handing the world on to our children.

STRIPLV: It's been said before, but given your skill to combine serious discussion with humor, perhaps you are best placed to guide us through into a more stable, sensible way of existing?

BRAND: Not sure about that, but the method of delivery is all-important, definitely. I find it boring sometimes when I'm having long political conversations - we must remember that we have playful, joyous creatures. It's okay to be stupid, okay to have fun, but we can start to use our energy to create better worlds.

STRIPLV: How do you look at the evils of addiction?

BRAND: I've learned there is nothing that's unsolvable. I don't believe it's valid anymore to be a victim of addiction. My problems were initially chronic heroin addiction and crack addiction. When you have those, it's the equivalent of swinging a car door open into a cyclist. Someone's going to get hurt. I had to admit there was a problem. I then had to believe it was possible to change. The first step towards change was not taking heroin every day. The second step was either to stop doing it, either by having the strength to lead that out myself (which I didn't have) or by accepting help from someone else. It's so deeply saddening when you meet people who don't think change is possible because it really is.

STRIPLV: You seem more positive and optimistic than during the time when we've chatted in the past.

BRAND: I believe human beings can do something different if they want to, and that's really all you need, that faith. I certainly don't have a cynical worldview. For all those who still hate him, Donald Trump is only ever a transitional moment. Brexit is only ever a transitional moment. What encourages me quite a lot is that the next generation seems a lot less wrapped up in the cynicism skeptical, the constant questioning that has defined this generation. I have worked with an organization called The Mix. It's like a helpline for kids, and they can talk anonymously. When I do that project, I get a real sense that they have more tolerance, openness, awareness, and alertness to things that you and I have to really struggle through. There is a resilience in young people that I hope they hold onto better than we have.





TOP
10

HOTTEST

AUSTRALIAN CELEBS

MR. SKIN'S TOP 10 HOTTEST AUSTRALIAN CELEBRITY'S

BY MRSKIN.COM

Mr. Skin celebrated Australia Day on January 26 by checking out what's "down under" our favorite Aussie celebrity's clothes. From Oscar nominees like Toni Collette and Margot Robbie to breakout TV sensations like Phoebe Tonkin and Bella Heathcote, these ten ladies might be the hottest Australian exports of all time. So whether it's Australia Day or just a regular day, these saucy Aussies will have you crying out, "Crikey. What a beauty."



BELLA HEATHCOTE

Melbourne native Bella Heathcote took the world by storm in the early 2010s with her ethereal good looks and beautiful body. Though she's doffed her duds several times on film, our favorite has to be her second season sex scene from the CBS



PHOEBE TONKIN

Born in Sydney in 1989, Phoebe Tonkin is one saucy Aussie we can't get enough of. Following her breakout role as a teen star on the mermaid series *H2O: Just Add Water*, Phoebe broke out of her clothes when she joined Showtime's *The Affair* for its fourth season. Ms. Tonkin shows her honkin' hooters when she strips for star Joshua Jackson in episode five.



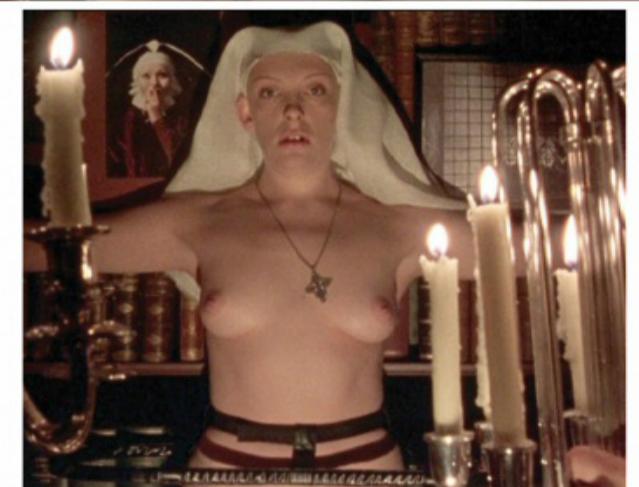
RUBY ROSE

Although she has spent her career as a model and actress cultivating an almost androgynous look, Ruby Rose is as brilliantly gorgeous as both red items whose name she bears. The lithe and lovely lady may be best known for playing the title role on the hit CW series *Batwoman*, but we'll never forget her amazing tits and ass in the prison shower on season three of *Orange Is the New Black*. Talk about a look that never goes out of fashion.



TONI COLLETTE

Oscar nominee Toni Collette began her career as one of the most acclaimed actresses around, and nearly thirty years later, she's even more esteemed. Ms. Collette has over twenty nude scenes to her name, but it's hard to top her fully shaved full-frontal scene in 1999's *8½ Women*. Dressed as a nun and surrounded by candles, Toni's hard wood floor shines through the darkness.



ELLE MACPHERSON

After gracing the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue cover for three consecutive years in the late 80s, Elle Macpherson became a household name. In 1994's Australian film *Sirens*, Elle confirmed how heavenly her body was when it wasn't sporting a swimsuit. Twenty-five minutes in, Elle makes a nude



debut for the ages, baring all to go skinny dipping with busty co-star Kate Fischer.



ABBY CORNISH



Few actresses are more game than Abbie Cornish, who has carved out a sexy path in Hollywood and her native Australia. From blockbuster flicks to independent hits, Abbie's never been shy about showing her tits. Abbie revealed her sweet teats in the 2006 addiction drama *Candy* alongside fellow Aussie Heath Ledger. Just 7 minutes in, Heath helps Abbie out of her bra before stumbling out of frame with her into the bedroom.



SAMARA WEAVING

As the niece of another Australian acting legend (*The Matrix*'s Hugo Weaving), Samara Weaving seemed destined for stardom. The smoking hot Adelaide native might get mistaken for fellow Aussie Margot Robbie, but Samara's beaten her own path to fame thanks to her considerable talents. 2020's *Last Moment of Clarity* brought Samara's topless debut, with the blonde beauty baring amazing tits and ass in one of four nude scenes.



YVONNE STRAHOVSKI

Though she spells her Polish last name phonetically, Yvonne Strahovski might still get you all tongue-tied. The down under hottie exploded in her scene-stealing role on the NBC sitcom *Chuck* before becoming a big-screen femme fatale for the ages. It may have felt like a long wait for Yvonne's nude debut, but when it came just 27 minutes into 2016's *Manhattan Night*, the ecstasy was second to none. Ms. Strahovski will make you jack-off-ski.



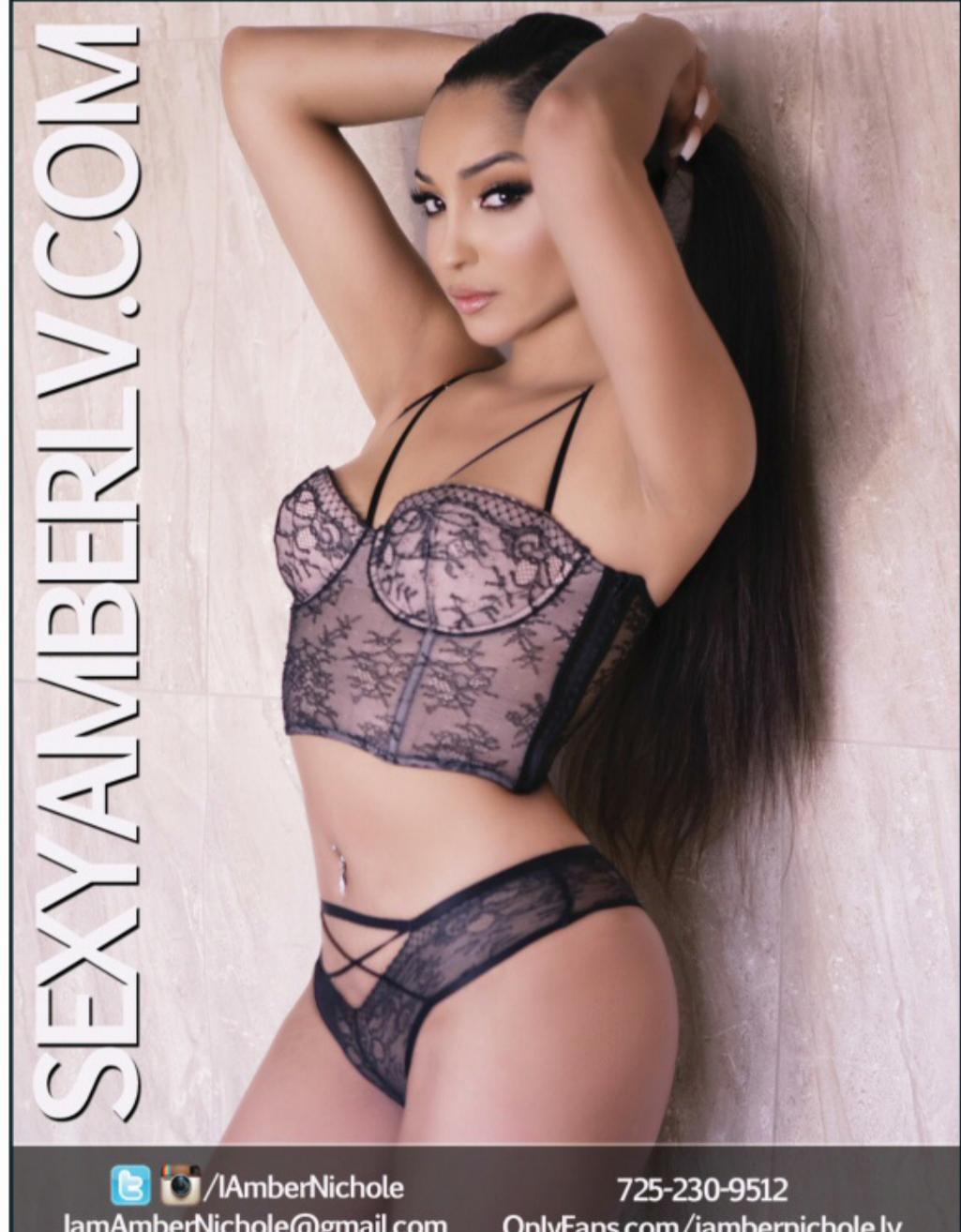
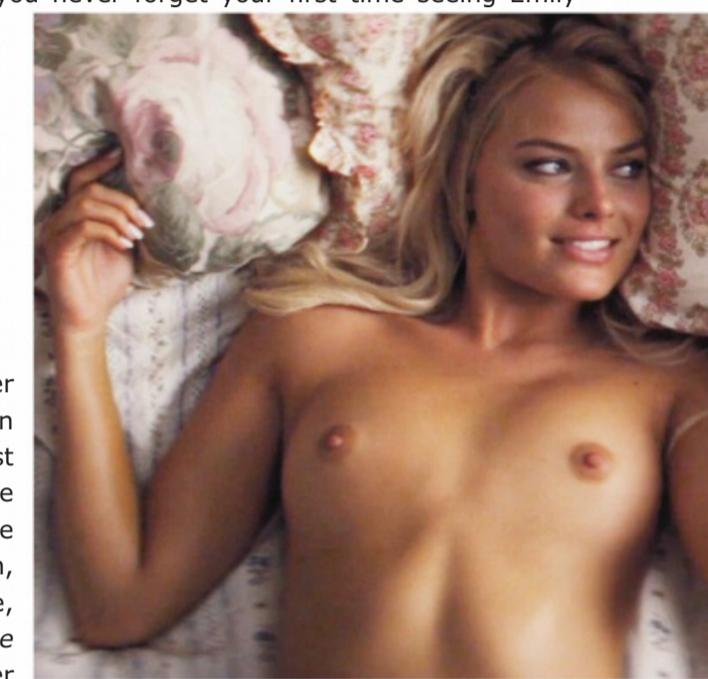
EMILY BROWNING

Starting as a child actor is never easy, but Emily Browning transitioned from child star to adult stunner with great ease. In 2011, at the age of 23, Emily turned heads as the lead in Zack Snyder's *Sucker Punch* before knocking us all out with her nude debut in the same year's *Sleeping Beauty*. Though she's been naked a bunch since then, you never forget your first time seeing Emily nude.



MARGOT ROBBIE

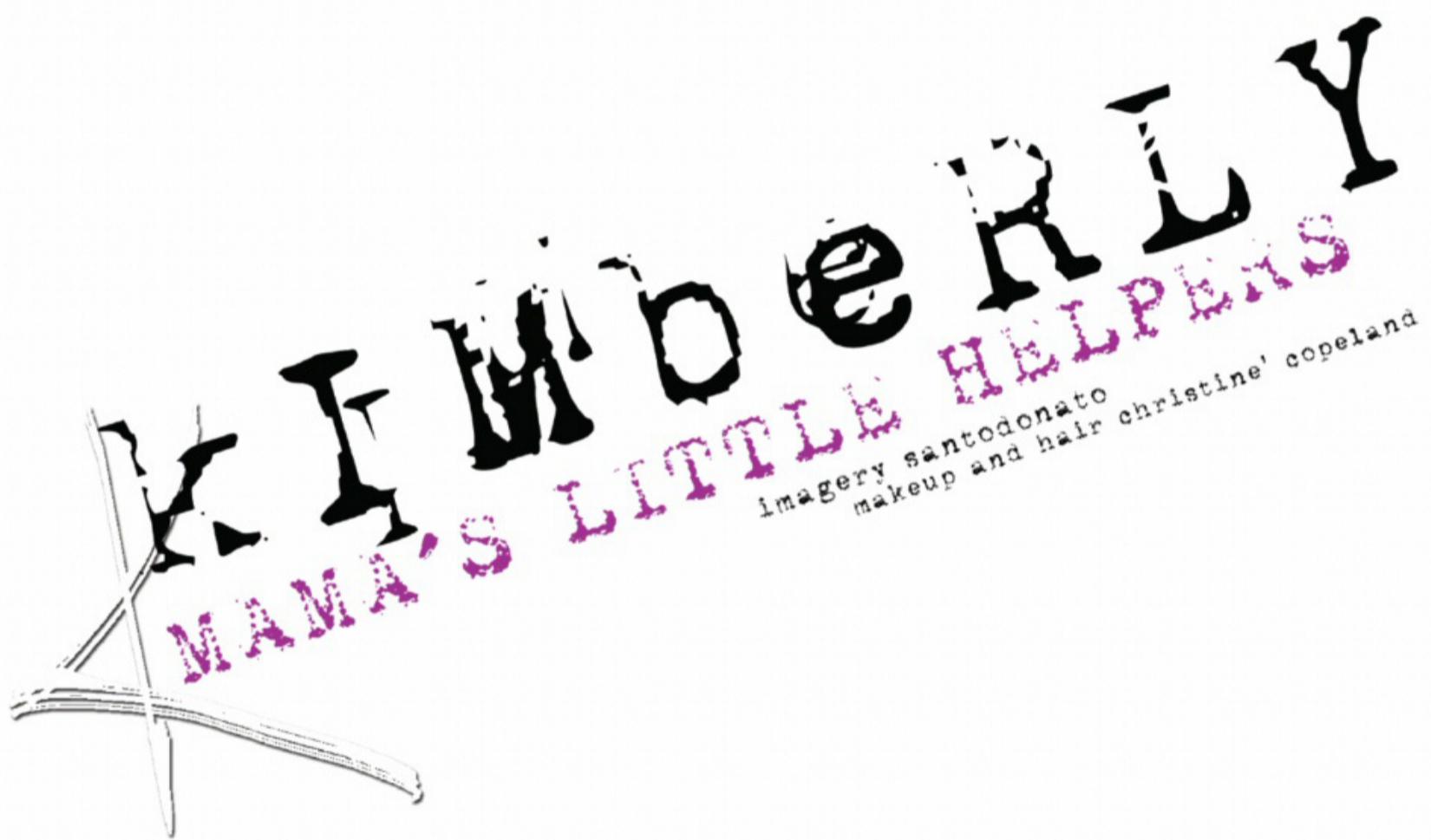
Who else could be the number one babe from down under than the biggest sensation of the last decade, Margot Robbie? While she has since become a household name thanks to playing Harley Quinn, Tonya Harding, and Sharon Tate, her breakout role in 2013's *The Wolf of Wall Street* launched her into the stratosphere. Margot stuns Leo and the rest of us just before the one hour mark by showing off some skincredible, fully shaved full-frontal. Ms. Robbie's been making us throbbie ever since.



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HOMUNCULUS

A FICTION SHORT-STORY BY BYRON CRAFT FROM SHOGGOTH 2 - RISE OF THE ELDERS

Can't he drive this damn car any faster? The tall man with a scar wanted to shout in the driver's ear. Did Malcolm Darby genuinely wish to save his wife, or was this lame attempt at driving to her rescue all for show? To show who, me? Does he want a witness to his wife's demise? Kim's, his spouse's, life was in the balance, and he was cruising down the dark tree-lined boulevard at 25 miles per hour. It was no time to observe the speed limit. He knew that it would surely ruin his chance for a bonus, but the situation required drastic action.

The tall man with the scar leaned to his left and reached over the Mercedes Sedan steering wheel. He pressed his client back against the bucket seat and switched on the car's high beams with one swift move. In an instant tall man straddled the sedan's center console with his left leg while taking control of the steering. Both hands on the wheel, he slammed his combat boot on top of a Versace Leather-Top Sneaker.

Malcolm Darby fought to maintain command of the vehicle, but the hired man's muscular frame made the attempt futile. Control lost; his foot pressed the peddle to the metal.

The Mercedes' 436 horsepower 3.0-liter V6 quickly accelerated. The tall man with the scar navigated the sedan across the cul-de-sac, jumping the curb at sixty miles per hour and headed straight for Darby Manor. Headlights blazing, they plowed through hedges, across intricately landscaped flower beds, and up the front steps of the Victorian mansion, crashing through the leaded glass doors. The Mercedes S-Class Sedan collided with the grand staircase opposite the front entry.

Darby Screamed.

The tall man with the scar had been hired to either rescue a neurotic plus hysterical housewife from demons she claimed haunted their spooky three-story mansion or have her committed if her declarations were proven to be fantasy. Kim and her tech giant businessman husband moved into Kim's ancestral home in the East Hamptons only a month before the tall man's arrival. Originally titled Quinn Gardens Estate, the house was one of several properties listed in a sizable family trust.

Kimberly Quinn, her name before marrying Malcolm, backed her husband's start-up ten-years earlier. A million-dollar investment sliced out of her trust fund that fostered the social media giant, Sphere. At the time, the dollar amount represented a sizable chunk of the fund. Over the decade, Sphere's value increased almost a

a sizable chunk of the fund. Over the decade, Sphere's value increased almost a million-fold becoming the first technology platform closing in on a trillion-dollar appraisal, and the tall man with a scar suspected that, over time, wifey might have outworn her usefulness for hubby.

Valued at over fifteen-million today, the stately home had been boarded up for over twenty years. It required an extensive makeover before being occupied. When the tall man with the scar was first escorted into the parlor, the house smelled of new carpeting and fresh paint. Mrs. Darby sat straight and rigid in an antique ladder-back chair. She looked like a statue, observed tall man; pale, what was the term, alabaster? "Good morning Mrs. Darby."

"Good morning," she replied mechanically.

"May I call you Kim?"

"Please."

"Let's start at the beginning Kim, tell me when you first became aware of these . . . events?"

"My husband told me that you are an expert in these cases," her right hand shook from an invisible twinge.

"I've been known to help out in similar situations," he kept his voice calm and steady. Kim's nerves were obviously on edge, and he could see that he would have to lead her to her story as gently as possible.

"The renovations to Darby Manor were wide-ranging and took six months to complete," she slowly answered as if it was painful to talk. "It . . . did not start until after the fourth month of reconstruction."

"What happened?" the tall man spoke softly.

"There is an old fireplace at the rear of the house, in what used to be my father's study. The hearth and clean-out pit were bolted shut with a thick iron plate. It was probably deep, creepy, and dark inside, I thought, and most likely, nobody ever wanted the job of cleaning it out. The house was converted to central heating years before; there is no need anymore for a fireplace in every room. I wanted to make the old study into a stylish tea room, reminiscent of the late nineteenth century. Most of the Hamptons homes are located in a string of seaside communities used as only summer destinations. We were making the manor into a year-round residence, and I desired to restore the fireplace for winter gatherings. Subsequently, I had the workmen remove the iron plate and clean the flue. It was after then that 'they' emerged."

"They?" again careful to keep his voice low, coaxing.

"Homunculus," she shuddered.

"Homunculus?" he felt stupid, echoing her every word, let alone not being familiar with the term.

A tear ran down Kim's right cheek, "Little men," she chocked, ". . . a sort of small human being, but not human. I call them that for lack of any other name. I discovered the appellation carved into the top of my father's old desk."

"When do you see them," he prodded. The tall man with the scar merited Malcolm Darby's suspicion of his wife being hallucinatory brought on by a neurotic nature. "At night. They don't like the light; I think it burns them. I turned on my bedroom light one evening, and the creatures were quick, thin, and more demonic than human . . . large heads and shredded flesh on their arms. Their hands and bare feet were mottled red and black. They shrieked and fled when the light came on."

Interesting, he puzzled. Would a hallucination be that profound? "How many were they?"

"Three, maybe four," Mrs. Darby stared past the tall man, a face frozen in terror. "Malcolm works late most nights. That is when they come. They whisper to me."

"What do they say?" Was he humoring the lady to lead her along to the nuthouse? But, then again, there was something deep inside of him that clawed with grim certainty.

"They want to take me down below . . . to become one of them."

The tall man with the scar had served two tours of duty in Afghanistan, he took the lives of many men and had become hardened against the horrors of war, but at that moment, a cold shiver ran up his spine. His throat had become dry and parched, "Has anyone else seen these creatures?"

"Yes, Alistair Plumlee, my decorator."

Continued on page 78

STRIPLV KINK features 86 or more pages of erotic nude photography, with each issue showcasing between 9 - 25 beautiful models touching on different sexual fetishes in each magazine. ■



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Continued from page 76

"Excellent!" Now we are getting somewhere, he opined internally, an eyewitness, maybe the high society babe wasn't so nuts after all. "I will want to question him as well."

"That won't be possible. Mr. Plumlee is deceased. He fell to his death from the top of our third story staircase. The coroner said Mr. Plumlee had a broken neck and probably died instantly," Malcolm's wife broke down crying. "I found a rope lying across the place where he tripped," she sobbed, "but when I went to pick it up . . . to take it, one of those horrifying little creatures pulled it from my grasp. It left as quickly as it appeared and vanished with the only evidence of their existence. No one believes me. My husband thinks I'm losing my mind."

"I believe you, Kim," he offered, not knowing why he had said it. Was he off his rocker too? The idea of the creatures coming out of a fireplace ash pit didn't sound rational. He was getting creeped out. Strange things began to happen when they unsealed the hearth. Then Mrs. Darby starts to see small creatures everywhere. Had she released demons into the house, demons her father might have imprisoned within the bowels of the old house decades ago? Little creatures of the night in the East Hamptons? It didn't seem credulous. An affluent area marked by long stretches of beaches and an interior of farmland, towns, and villages with mansions hidden behind tall boxwood hedges, a home to high-end restaurants, bars, and designer boutiques. Could it be possible?

Tall man did his best to calm his client's wife until the day-nurse entered, more than likely summoned by the sounds of her mistress's sobbing, carrying a tranquilizer and a glass of water. He wished that she had brought a stiff drink for him.

Once Mrs. Darby was settled, he went to the back of the house and inspected the fireplace. The firebrick at the rear of the opening had become hardened from the heat of long ago continual use. He knocked against it with the knuckles of his right hand. The stuff was as hard as a rock. His eyes adjusted to the interior gloom, and he spotted marks engraved on the bricks. They formed a pattern. Not exactly a pattern, they formed a pentacle—one of the cabalistic signs used in ancient magic.

Sticking his head partway into the open hearth, tall man detected the faint odor of urine and rosemary. What an odd thing to smell, he thought.

There was a reason to hope that Mrs. Darby's experience was only partly hallucinatory for the tall man with a scar. He sat in a red leather chair across from Malcolm Darby's desk and watched as he signed tall man's service agreement. After his interview with Darby's wife and the fireplace's inspection, he decided to take on the assignment. Whatever developed the payday would be sizable, which bothered him because he questioned Malcolm Darby's motives. For tall man, it would not be a win-lose scenario, more like a win-win. However, for Darby, it was as if the man wasn't interested in the results, only an outcome, whatever that may be?

He wished that he had time to research the possible existence of these so-called homunculus creatures. In years past, his brother had dabbled in ancient texts; he had procured while living in Arkham, Massachusetts. The Necronomicon, the Book of Eibon, Cultes des Goules, and others he could not begin to pronounce. Given time he might have found a clue in those old books to their existence and just maybe their destruction. Now there was little time left. The sun had already set, and the lady's husband just dawdled. It was a good half-hour drive back to the Hamptons and the manor, and they just sat while boss man re-read, for the third stretch, the service agreement.

Mrs. Darby had been left at home, alone. The day-nurse left at five so had the workmen, which scared the crap out of the tall man with a scar. He had been led to believe that they would be away for only a short period and return before dark. That, obviously, was not happening. Malcolm Darby's cell phone rang, and tall man jumped. Darby answered in the speakerphone mode. The frantic voice of Kim's screaming was audible across the spacious office. She pleaded for Malcolm's return, "They're back, I can hear them running through the house, they're coming for me!" she cried.

The two quickly rose to their feet and fled the office. It was more than Kim's screaming that motivated the tall man with the scar to race to her aid. He heard additional sounds on the other end of the cell call. It could not be the result of a deranged wife attempting to manipulate the attention of her spouse. No ventriloquist could master what he had just heard—in the background, talking simultaneously with Mrs. Darby's pleas for help, the low chattering of other voices, whispers in a darkened house.

The airbags deployed, and the proximity alarm squealed. The speed of the Mercedes S-Class Sedan was defeated by the abrupt impact with the grand

staircase. The left headlamp, still intact, illuminated the foyer and parlor of Darby Manor. The still spinning fan blades of the luxury auto's cooling system squealed with a metallic screech when slammed against the radiator. Through the driver's side window, the tall man with the scar and Malcolm Darby gaped at a trio of hideous dwarfs, no more than two-feet tall, dragging the unconscious form of Mrs. Darby toward the rear of the house. A fourth stood trapped in the car's single high beam. They watched as the gangrenous flesh of the thing smoked and then burst into a flaming mass of epidermis. Less than a second elapsed while tall man squinted his eyes shut and shook his head to clear his mind of the image. Eyes re-opened, the little imp was gone and along with its three companions, leaving their captive behind.

The tall man with the scar sat in the ladder-back chair within the Darby Manor parlor. He had turned off all the lights in the house. It was pitch black. Mrs. Darby had been taken away in an ambulance to a private hospital. She was still unconscious, almost comatose. Malcolm, playing the role of the dedicated husband, accompanied her. Besides himself, the house was empty—well almost.

The scuttling of clawed feet scampered across the carpet. The sound of puppies at play? The creepy sounds of raccoons invading a home or worse? The tall man heard swishes, tissue paper tearing? Whispers in the dark? More than one voice. They were close. He could feel their foul breath on the back of his neck as they climbed the rungs of the chair behind him.

"Not lady," one hissed.

"Take him, need new brother," breathed another utterance.

A third voice sizzled, "Stick with claws, make sleep like lady."

"Take below, make like us," all rustled and taunted.

Earlier that day, the tall man with a scar visited the local village's hardware store and stocked up on incandescent floodlights and extension cords. A merry string of them circled the parlor pointing to the center of the room where he sat. An electric cord with a line switch strung across his lap. He felt the clawed hand of corrupt flesh on his neck. "Sleep my body," it shushed in his ear.

The tall man with a scar flexed a thumb and turned the cord switch—the parlor filled with the blinding glare of a dozen 250-watt lights. The hideous demons from the depths of Darby Manor no longer whispered. A chorus of three burst into mortal shrieks of terror. His first impression was of a police siren mixed with a woman's scream. The sounds of their cries quickly morphed into unholy cries from the bowels of the underworld.

The retinal after image cast upon his pupils subsided in time for him to witness the homunculus threesome from hell burst into flames and fall to the carpet in smoldering heaps of pulp.

The next morning, Malcolm Darby didn't seem to mind that flaming gnomes ruined his new carpeting. The tall man with the scar got the impression that Darby Manor would no longer become their place of residence. As added insurance, tall man had bolted the cast iron plate back over the hearth opening, sealing the depths below, he hoped, for decades to come. As commissioned, Darby had brought along his checkbook. He wrote out the amount with a flourish, seemingly pleased with himself and the writing of the payment. The tall man assumed that Malcolm Darby, a man of great wealth, got immense pleasure in handing out large sums of money to the astonished underclass. He was probably also glad that the task had been fulfilled. Mrs. Darby had been committed. She appeared to be in a continual state of shock, "catatonic, unresponsive," he had been told.

Smiling, Malcolm shook his hand, "You destroyed my Mercedes, the front entrance to the manor, and managed to ruin our carpet in the process, but you got the job done better than any man could. Your skills and ability seem to come naturally to you?"

The tall man with a scar nodded. "As my great grandfather from Arkham used to say, 'I investigate all things that go bump in the night.'"

As for Malcolm Darby, tall man hoped that he would have the opportunity to meet him again someday on less cordial grounds.

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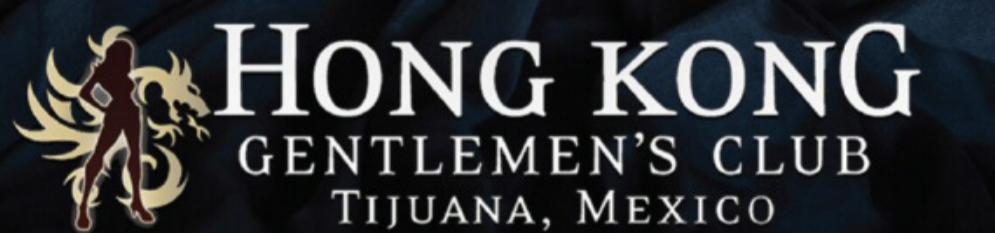
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